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ABSTRACT

The procedures utilized by the Learning Assistance Center at the University of California, Davis Campus, to evaluate its programs and the subsequent ongoing evaluation process were described in this paper. In order to gather the needed information, four different evaluation techniques were utilized. The first technique was to collect general demographic information from IBM cards filled out during the student's first visit to the Learning Assitance Center. The second method was directed specifically toward those people starting a program but attending two times or less. The third method was to invite a random sample of the Center users to spend an hour one evening discussing their experiences in depth. The fourth source of feedback was to send a four-page survey to all students using the Learning Assistance Center facilities for the year. The format of this survey encouraged comments and suggestions regarding experiences at the Learning Assistance Center, funding cost/benefit ratio, and recommendations for new areas and programs. These procedures endeavored to maximize student input in assessment, which proved useful in setting priorities for current projects and directing future program development. (TS)

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Developing Program Evaluation: An Ongoing Process

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Since the Learning Assistance Center at the University of California, Davis Campus has been in existence, the necessity for program appraisal has been realized. This paper will describe procedures utilized by the Center to evaluate its programs and the subsequent ongoing evaluation process. In addition, philosophical concerns affecting the evaluation process will be examined.

Why Evaluate?

Evaluators are faced with situations which require prior knowledge of the evaluation process and flexibility to adapt this process as determined by individual needs and goals. The following section examines some of the considerations which may be appropriate to explore before undertaking an evaluation. In looking at any evaluation process the

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first step is to answer the question -- Why evaluate? A clear concept of the goals for your evaluation will help simplify and direct the evaluation process as well as insure collecting the appropriate data for decision making.

Some of the possible goals include justification of budget dollars, using work load indicators. This is currently termed accountability. The Center is mainly funded through student registration fees. Therefore, an annual Learning Assistance Center report is requested by the Registration Fee Committee. Included in this report are the results of subjective student participant appraisal. Measuring a program's effectiveness through behavioral objectives can be another goal of evaluation. The improvement of program planning by establishing yearly, quarterly, or daily trends may be a goal of evaluation. Simply a descriptive identification of your population's characteristics may be useful. This needs assessment of individuals can allow for client-directed growth in response to new needs, desires and interests. Of course most evaluation programs have two or more of the above as vaguely defined goals.

By first clearly stating your goals and objectives for the evaluation you will better be able to ask the correct questions. This will provide useful and accurate information. Questions that are too general or too specific allowing only limited responses often waste time in development and in tabulation. In addition to the wasted effort the data collected may be false, inaccurate and misleading.

In looking at program development and growth we feel it is important to allow a varied format of evaluation unless a very limited scope of assessment is desired. The response of people both to evaluation and program processes vary greatly. To encompass this range of attitudes

and to accurately evaluate an area of interest it is important to allow this variety to express itself. While forced choice answers are easiest to tabulate they often miss important feedback, which may account for the low return of distributed surveys.

It is important also to examine your resources for and method of distribution, collection and analysis of the data. Time and effort often are especially limited at this point in the evaluation process. A simple survey may generate five times the information desired, requiring ten times the effort expected to interpret the data. This type of frustration quickly terminates any continued interest in the evaluation process.

To maximize the collection of both specific information and flexibility for the unexpected, the Learning Assistance Center has undertaken a set of evaluation procedures from the very specific demographic data collection to the very general indepth interviews.

In undertaking an evaluation process it is also very important to develop a positive attitude among the staff about this process. A success/failure orientation tends to group evaluation with failure and blame rather than growth and discovery. When a staff has learned to view the evaluation process from this growth, decision making perspective rather than personal judgement and threat of loss or exposure, the evaluation tool will be more readily incorporated in planning, programming and development as an ongoing process. The process of evaluation to be described here has helped in determining the paths of continual growth for the Learning Assistance Center at Davis. The trends indicated by participant response have been useful in setting priorities for

current projects and directing future program development. This allows for client-directed growth, in which the student makes suggestions for program modification which he feels will further meet his needs.

Techniques Used

In order to gather needed information, four different evaluation techniques were utilized. Our general demographic information is collected from IBM cards filled out during the student's first visit to the Learning Assistance Center. We don't record everyone entering the Center but only those deciding to begin a program with the Learning Assistance Center. This descriptive information is converted into a computer data bank for use in studying yearly and quarterly trends and changes. This avoids hours of hand tabulation. In addition, a file source for the other three methods, is provided.

The second method is directed specifically toward those people startting a program but attending two or less times. This format allows us to guage response to new changes in procedures. The data from mini-surveys (on double post cards sent out twice a year) tend to show the crush of course demands plus personal commitments most often prevent students from returning. The student often intends to return later for further work, indicating continued interest in the Center.

Our third method is to invite a random sample of the Center users to spend an hour one evening discussing their experience in depth. We use student interns with interviewing skills to conduct the evening meetings. We provide an orientation to the Learning Assistance Center's facilities and programs for the interviewers including a list of general

areas of interest to our staff. These are only to provide a general beginning for the informal discussion of experiences, perferences and suggestions. This in depth information is then compiled by the interviewer and reported to the staff.

The fourth source of feedback is from a four page survey sent to all students using the Learning Assistance Center facilities for the year. The survey is divided into several areas (such as workshops taken, tutoring, etc.). This format encourages comments and suggestions regarding experiences at the Learning Assistance Center, funding cost/benefit ratio, and recommendations for new areas and programs.

The following questions are samples of those used in the above described techniques.

Demographic Data Questionnaire

1. Have you ever been to the Learning Assistance Center before? A. Yes B. No

2. Your present class: A. Freshman B. Sophomore C. Junior D. Senior E. Graduate

3. How were you referred to the Learning Assistance Center: A. Friend B. Counselor C. Instructor D. Advertisement E. EOP N. Dean's Office

Mini-Survey

Please circle services used: Individual Workshop Tutor Lab

Please check the appropriate line(s) which apply to you:

_____ Had schedule conflicts preventing LAC participation.

_____ Got what I wanted from LAC. (space for comments)

_____ Didn't get what I wanted. (space for comments)

In-depth Interview Questions

1. What skills did you acquire from workshop participation?

2. Do you have any suggestions concerning lengths of workshops, times offered, or format(s) used?

3. How helpful was tutoring?

4. Was advice received useful?

5. Would you recommend LAC services to a friend?

Year-End Survey

In terms of helping you achieve your educational goals at the University of California at Davis how would you rate each aspect of the Learning Assistance Center?

List of Aspects	Responses for Each Aspect From Which to Chose	Open-Ended Remarks
Workshops Taken	Great Help Some Help Little Help No Help Does Not Apply	Space provided for comemnts and suggestions regarding each aspect listed.
Individual Sessions		
Tutoring		
Intake Procedure		
Group Orientation		
Other_____		

In 1973-74, from these sources we received twelve recommendations for changes. Of these ten were implemented resulting in new areas and

options to be evaluated and modified. Data gathered indicated that student users of the Learning Assistance Center services were more than satisfied with their experience. However, concern about student under-utilization of these services was voiced.

Recommendations

Of the recommendations implemented, three which are of particular importance will be discussed here. The action taken on these suggestions had an impact in the modification of the Learning Assistance Center programming.

The recommendations and action step(s) taken were:

1. More publicity-especially outreach to dorms and other advising services. More student newspaper advertisement. More work on creative, eye-catching advertisements.

Action Taken: Dorm workshops and orientations were added to the Learning Assistance Center programming. More information sent to all advising services. Increased publicity through student newspaper advertisement and staff participation in many new student orientations.

2. Shorten the intake process. (i.e. filling out initial forms, time to take the study skills survey)

Action Taken: A critical study of the forms and tests used to decide what was necessary information to have before seeing a student. As a result, the demographic data questionnaire was shortened and the study skills survey administered to each student was modified. These format changes eliminated a lot of "red tape"

producing a more efficient and shorter initial intake process.

3. The Learning Assistance Center needs a fact sheet or brochure which students could read when they come to the Learning Assistance Center. This would make it easier to ask for help.

Action Taken: A brochure was in progress and when finished was used in our publicity efforts. Student responses and questions commonly noted in our year-end survey assisted in the compiling of the final product.

From the analysis of the data gathered, these are examples of recommendations formulated and subsequent action steps taken. If no action is taken, then the time and energy expended to do program evaluation is of little or no avail. However, the process does not stop here.

Consequences of Action Taken

The implementation of student recommendations made the operation of the Center more efficient and appealing to the Davis students. As a result, four times as many students came to the Center for assistance in the Fall of 1974 as in the Fall of 1973. This created, at peak times, a three to four week backlog of student appointments which was a barrier to meeting student needs. This resulted even though the staff worked many overtime hours. In other words, the action steps taken were successful in reaching more students who needed Learning Assistance Center services. However, this great influx created a need to change some procedures which were liked (as indicated on surveys, interviews, etc.) by most of the students who utilized our services the year before.

The most significant program change occurred in our initial interview procedure. In 1973-1974, the student filled out intake forms and then was assigned an individual appointment with a specialist. During this hour, the specialist would interpret the study skills survey taken, inform the student of various services offered, administer a diagnostic reading test, and get to know this individual student's situation. The discussion led to a mutual decision regarding the best skill building program for the student. This individualized approach was well liked. However, the numbers of students coming in as a result of better publicity, etc. prohibited the continuing use of such a procedure. Thus, a small group orientation format (at most, six people) was udertaken to alleviate problems presented by increased student usage. This met our immediate need of eliminating long waiting lists and long work hours. With this change in programming, the need arises once again to evaluate how these changes affect the student coming to the Learning Assistance Center. So, the process continues.

Conclusion

Although the attempted appraisal of any program may lead to unexpected results and a need for continual re-evaluation, the necessity of client participation in program development is of foremost importance. This client feedback instills new ideas and creativity to assist in maintaining and evaluating a developing program.

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